



## BEFORE & AFTER

### A Dream Comes True After Six Years

#### Local Roma NGO and Peace Corps Volunteer take an abandoned building and turn it into a learning center filled with opportunities

*What is the shelf-life of your biggest dream? One year? Four years? Six years. That's how long the people at the Roma NGO Future Foundation in the southern Bulgarian town of Rakitovo dreamed of having an educational center. They imagined a place where children and parents could meet to pursue knowledge as part of the Foundation's work to achieve higher living standards for the local Roma community.*

*Peace Corps volunteer in Rakitovo Apryl Gibson helped the NGO write a project for a grant from the USAID Small Projects Assistance (SPA) program. Meanwhile, Rakitovo municipality agreed to rent the building at a discount. Young volunteers brainstormed ideas for activities and materials in the center. Parents around town promised to help create the center.*

*In February 2006, the NGO received word that their project would be financed. In addition to USAID funding, in-kind support was provided by C.E.G.A. (Creating Effective Grassroots Alternatives) Foundation in Sofia, the Municipality of Rakitovo, the U.S. Embassy, and the citizens of Rakitovo.*

*On October 11, 2006, the "Educational and Informational Center for Children and Parents" was officially opened. Dancers and singers from various ethnic groups put on a show and water was thrown on the ground to smooth the way, in the Bulgarian tradition.*

*Today dozens of local children participate in English, Spanish, art and computer classes in the center. The Future Foundation conducts all its meetings and workshops there. A book collection of 30 folktales gathered by young people entitled "Folktales from the Mahala" was officially presented in the center. The center informs parents of the structure of the local government and of their rights, and encourages regional initiative groups, schools and young people to develop their own projects.*



Photo: Peace Corps

**BEFORE** The NGO Future Foundation found a building abandoned by a pre-school and in this hollow shell with its rickety walls, holes in the floor and a sad layer of filth they saw a goldmine. They had many exciting ideas how to transform the worn-out rooms into a multi-purpose classroom, a library, a computer salon, an office, and a meeting hall.



Photo: Peace Corps

**AFTER** The foundation undertook a major refurbishment of the building which took over six months. They remodeled the rooms according to the new plan, painted the walls and laid tiles, installed electric cables, lights and radiators, and brought in new equipment such as tables, chairs, desks, cabinets, books, and computers.